



## Starting from the Middle— Handshaking in Hökarängen

*Art Projects as Working Methods for Producing the City Differently*

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## **Starting from the middle - Handshaking in Hökarängen**

*Value struggles in a Stockholman suburb - art projects as working methods for producing the city differently*

Author name

### **Abstract**

This text analyses the project *Home Works*, an art program which took place in 2015-17 in the neighbourhood of Hökarängen in the south of Stockholm. The argument of the article is that *Home Works* can be seen as a socio-material practice of producing the city differently. I thus propose that *Home Works* provides an example of how art projects hold a potential as methodologies for enacting versions of the city that connect to contemporary social struggles as well as to the right to the city. The text applies a pragmatist, ANT-inspired methodology and proposes that urban realities are enacted through practices and co-shaped by the spatial and architectural environment. The text is thus an intervention into an art discourse that has been preoccupied with defining socially engaged art as communicative (as a layer of reality that can be added or removed) and with a trend in urban studies which views temporary art projects as subservient to gentrification-driven urban restructurings.

Keywords: contemporary art, gentrification, urban restructuring,

### **Introduction**

A recurring word in discussions today about the role of art in urban spaces and zones of urban regeneration is “art washing”. (Pritchard 2018) There is a complicity between a creative city discourse, and the use of art to support the value cycles of gentrification (Ley 2003). Thus, art is seen to increase the “livability” and the attractiveness of urban neighbourhoods, when social art projects engage with local communities and thus provide social sustainability, memorable events, vibrant, and a creative environment on which real estate thrives (Christensen 2016). This article argues that what is being overlooked in these accounts is the fact that art initiatives, due to their hybrid, performative *and* material methodologies, may in fact interfere into the social and material realities of an urban environment. By doing this, they are not simply acting on the surface or adding

a value to a locality. They are, in fact, contributing to a reconfiguring of the total environment, of the spatial, material relations that make up that location. I will refer to this as a capacity for “ontological politics” and by using this term I suggest that the methodologies applied in site specific art projects, possess a capacity to enact other realities, other social and material worlds (Mol 1999, Law, 1998).

My analysis will be an examination of the art program *Home Works* which was carried out in Konsthall C, a contemporary art center located 20 min by public transport south east of Stockholm city center. However, before moving on to discuss this project in detail, I will outline the context for my analysis in the field of gentrification studies, architecture and art. I will list the urgencies that it seeks to engage with, as well as account for the methodology that informs my analysis.

Increasingly, art becomes intertwined with processes of urban regeneration. After the turn of the 21st Century, which saw the restructuring of European urban centers such as Berlin as new epicenters of urban regeneration, a new scheme for urban revitalization and a discourse of creative city has been sanctioned, which leaves for temporary art projects the role of collaborator, intentionally or not, when urban neighbourhoods undergo transition to gentrified, high value, life style environments (Colomb 2012). In a Scandinavian context, this model of creative city revitalization has become normalized into policy making and urban planning as a standard procedure of transforming cities from industrial production to a new economy based on knowledge and service industries (Thörn & Holgersson, Jensen 2005). The allocation of the role of collaborator within a hierarchy of urban actors can be observed in the research field of urban studies, where temporary art projects are predominantly seen to pave the way for a commodification process, and for a developer friendly take-over of urban spaces. (Evans, 2006, Colomb 2012,) One of the shortcomings of this narrative is the tendency towards generalization, which rarely delve into the particularities of the relationship between a specific art project and processes of urban regeneration. While art sometimes definitely lends itself to speeding up the value cycles demanded by gentrification, it is not sufficient merely to determine that it activates community engagement, or that it injects aesthetic values into an urban location. The premise on which such an evaluation rests is that the nature of the relationship between art and location is seen as one of adding value into an already given urban situation. It does not address the more fundamental, and for a critical perspective urgent, question of the nature of the relationship between a specific art initiative and an urban locality.

From an art theoretical perspective, the intertwining of art and urban regeneration coincides with a wider transformation, since the 1960s, of the function of art in a service economy under the auspices of ‘cognitive capitalism’ (Sigler 2017, Rolnik 2011). Within this transformation, the object status and material dimensions of art have been deemphasized and the *immaterial* qualities, the discursive, relational, affective, and social aspects of art production have been privileged. Thus, a “dematerialization narrative” can be traced historically from the 1960s with Lucy Lippard’s *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* as a catalyzer of conceptual art’s abandonment of auratic objects, to Miwon Kwon’s genealogical study of site specificity in which the dismissal of materiality in art appears as a break with phenomenological conceptions of site towards ethnographically and discursively informed reconfigurations of site – discretely referencing Hal Foster’s “the artist as ethnographer” (Kwon 2004, Lippard 1973, Foster 2004). The majority of theories of site specificity after Kwon, narrates the development as a movement away from physicality towards discursivity and social cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, there have been historical reasons for these interventions, critique of art as auratic objects, or critique of the notion of the site as merely a phenomenological entity. Nevertheless, such narratives have reinforced a discursive conception of art practices – thereby devaluing the material aspects of art. In the 21st century a proliferation of new theories and terms that account for relational and socially engaged art practices have reinforced the emphasis on the discursive, communicative aspects of art. Among the most influential propositions are Grant Kester’s “dialogical aesthetics”, Nicolas Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics”, as well as Claire Bishop’s critique of “socially engaged art” and Peter Weibel’s “context art”. This trajectory of dematerialization correlate with more recent discussions of art’s status as *immaterial labor*. Such discussions have pointed to art as emblematic of post-industrial production and thus illustrative of the new concept of work, as creative and communicative, as the merging of work and non-work (Sigler).

On the other hand, there is a tradition of art methodologies that engages with the production and distribution of urban space. Situationism’s urban interventions of the 1960s are important historical precursors to this. Among the most influential theoretical contributions are Susan Lacy’s coinage of *New Genre Public Art* and Rosalyn Deutsche’s analysis of critical art interventions in public spaces (Lacy, Deutsche). Spatial concerns are, however, not the focus of Lacy’s analysis, which concentrates on defining a new relationship between the artist and the public, one defined by social

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<sup>1</sup> Among these proponents are: Peter Weibel in *Context Kunst*, Nicolas Bourriaud *Relational Aesthetics* 1998, Shannon Jackson in *Social Works* 2011



and political engagement. Deutsche, on the other hand, focuses on art as a form of spatial critique, and explicitly, using Lefebvre's notion of the production of space, addresses the issue of spatial organization and material design as an ideologically contested field. While Deutsche's critique is an important contribution to address new possible critical roles of art in processes of urban revitalization and to highlight how redesign of public spaces are implicated in political and social change, she still operates within the practice of "critique". urban reality is conceived as something that can be revealed, uncovered by the means of conceptual art practices. Nevertheless, urban reality remains a given. Recently, however, new transdisciplinary research has begun to pop up in the margins of the art field, which, influenced by pragmatist, actor-network-theory, and new materialist approaches, turns to art and other contemporary practices as involved in the spatial and material reproduction of the city (Laister, Lederer, Makovec 2013). Contributing to this are also new forms of transdisciplinary research in architecture, which mobilize architecture as a tool to enact social, ethical and political change. (Dabaieh & Alwall 2018, Petrescu & Trogal 2017, Olney 2020) It is to these emerging methodologies in art and architecture that the present text wishes to contribute.

## **Methodology**

The methodology that I bring into this text is informed by pragmatism and New Materialism. It is based on a recent shift in urban studies as well as in architectural theory towards multiplicity and understandings of reality, and cities, as instable arrangements of social and material components (Farias & Bender 2010, Yaneva 2017). Firstly, this position implies that reality is not considered an already grounded "out there". Rather it is continuously being invented through communities of practice. Secondly, from this principally ungroundedness and coexistence of multiple realities follow that in order to exist, reality must be enacted (Law & Urry 2004). The following text thus seeks to investigate the capacities of art practices to enact realities. Another implication of a pragmatist approach is that space is understood as relational, as something that comes into being by enacting specific physical, economic and social relations (Massey 2005). The concept of socio-material working, with which I engage in this text, has been borrowed from architectural theorist Alben Yaneva, whose pragmatist, STS-informed methodology, shifts attention from formal architectural qualities to the ways in which architecture connects things and people in specific ways. Behind the term "socio-material working" lies the assumption that reality becomes co-shaped by social uses of space and the connecting agency of architecture: "reality does not precede the

mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices” (Yaneva 2017, p. 107). This approach signals a shift in how to understand the political nature of architecture, and design of urban spaces as well as social practices. Rather than viewing politics as a way to critique reality, to expose meanings and to disagree with meanings, as in Deutsche’s account, politics becomes inherent to the very crafting of reality, that is, it becomes a question of ‘intra-acting’ with the conditions of possibility that shape reality.<sup>2</sup> It becomes an ontological question.<sup>3</sup> What is critical to understand in relation to the concept of socio-material working is that it does not suggest that anything can become reality. Enactments of reality are not “a matter of free and creative choice”, they are precisely “workings”, that is they work from within the middle of the at once open and contested relations that constitute our social and material worlds (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013). It is to this notion of “socio-material working” involved in art practices that I now want to turn.

### ***Home Works***

*Home Works* was a curatorial program that unfolded within the premises of Konsthall C. Curated by Jens Stenberg and Jenny Richards it took its form as a practice-based investigation into the status of domestic labour – or more precisely how work performed in the home, be it manual, affective, social or care work, could be mobilized as a site of political action. In line with the ideas of New Institutionalism, according to which *Home Works* unfolded as part exhibition series, part research project, part community center, and part artistic laboratory (Gordon Nesbitt 2003, Esche 2013). It consisted of eleven exhibitions, two symposiums, several communal dinners, knitting cafes, and weekly cooking groups. However, rather than a series of exhibitions and curated public programs around a main topic, what *Homes Works* did, was to activate multiple formats and public platforms in order to enable a site-specific exploration of new practices of the home, of domestic work and of neighbourhood. Whereas in its initial stage, *Home Works* was a manifestation of “travelling concerns” around domestic work, circulating within an international art community, gradually *Home Works* turned vernacular: it evolved into a multi-faceted, locally committed, exploration of

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<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of the concept of ‘intra-action’ see Harraway, 2016, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> In arguing that politics should be understood as an ontological question, Yaneva refers to John Law, and more specifically here to Annemarie Mol’s examination of Law’s use of the term: “ontological politics”. As Mol demonstrates, the claim posed by actor network theory and related theories that reality is multiple causes radical consequences. It leads to a convergence of ontology and politics in which politics turns into a question of crafting reality.

new practices embedded in the urban and spatial texture of Hökarängen.<sup>4</sup> Occupying the former community laundry, for example, evolved itself as a contingent spatial practice of mediating the social and material relations that were already installed there. Thus, what came to define HW was that it did not move forward by executing a master plan. Rather, it took its direction from the contingency of the process itself, as well as from the unfolding of events in the neighbourhood. Another curatorial decision that strengthened the status of *Home Works* as a continuous becoming was the decision by curators Jenny Richards and Jens Strandberg to engage two long term collaborators: feminist thinker and writer Gunilla Lundahl and the artist Joanna Lombard. The role of these two dialogue partners was to help facilitating and formulating the ongoing research questions that gave direction to *Home Works*.

### **Konsthall C –at once a product of and a resistance to the economization of space in Hökarängen**

Right from its establishment in 2003, Konsthall C has been intimately connected with urban revitalization programs and transformations of the area initiated by the City of Stockholm as part of the *Stockholmsvisionen 2030*<sup>5</sup>. Crucially, however, in terms of its constituent legacies, Konsthall C was not founded on the basis of a top-down policy of urban regeneration. The art center opened as an art experiment conceived by the artist Per Hasselberg and supported by the citizen-led, informal community council Staddelsrådet. Nevertheless, Konsthall C was the pioneering manifestation in Hökarängen of a shift in city planning strategies from investment in social provision to a creative city discourse, in which art and culture became instrumental as official strategies for raising the attractiveness of an area (Kindgreen & Gunnars 2015). Prior to the establishment of Konsthall C, an “art cluster” was planned in the building. Stockholmshem, the largest social housing company in Hökarängen, owning 15 % of all social housing in the area, took the initiative to open up artist studios with reduced rents in the loft of the laundry building in which Konsthall C opened. Similarly, the common kitchen in Konsthall C, was used as a space for meetings between consultants representing Stockholmshem and local resident organizations in a large-scale urban revitalization project, *Sustainable Hökarängen*, which became the spearhead of a gentrification process that were to reconfigure the valorization of space, communal livelihood and the

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<sup>4</sup> *Home Works* took its inspiration from previous collective and process-driven art programs such as *The Grand Domestic Revolution* at CASCO, Utrecht in 2012, *The Grand Domestic Revolution Library*, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm 2014, and the ongoing program *Communal Knowledge* at The Showroom, London.

<sup>5</sup> *Konsthall C 10 år – en ofullständig historia*, pp. 8-9. See also Borén & Young, 2017 for a discussion of the role played by Per Hasselberg and Staddelsrådet as actors in cooperating with Stockholmshem on the urban restructuring process in Hökarängen.

composition of residents in the years 2011-14.<sup>6</sup> From the outset, Konsthall C was thus conditioned by a temporal coincidence with this new city-branding discourse and the practice of using art to re-brand an area, commonly referred to as “artwashing” (Pritchard 2018).<sup>7</sup> Parallel to, as well as prior to, this culturally, and branding-driven gentrification process, Stockholm’s city council built new houses that were privately owned apartments in Hökarängen, so statistically the percentage of private ownership figures rose in the area. This new housing policy led to a comprehensive privatization of the former model of Swedish commonality housing. These sweeping changes of the ideological grounding and rationalities informing the management of space and conditioning the livelihood of the community in the surroundings have made up the immediate horizon of Konsthall C since its inauguration in 2003. They signal a dramatic shift in the public discourse around housing from a “social problem”, a question of the *folkhemmet*, as formulated by Gunnar Myrdal and Uno Ahlén, the founders in Sweden of postwar urban planning, to a private concern in the discourse of creative place-making. It also dramatically shifts the terms through which the question of social reproduction can be accessed, from issues of democracy and community practice to issues of livability – and to community as an amenity for a privileged group of citizens. *Home Works* set out in the wake of *Hallbara Hökarängen* and from its outset it addressed the political shift from thinking housing in terms of collective solutions to housing as an individual concern. Occupying this ambivalent position, unintentionally feeding into the value cycles of gentrification, was the condition of possibility for *Home Works* to work in the area.

### **The suburban city as a reproductive unit**

In order to provide a framework for how *Home Works* connected to, and enacted different versions of, Hökarängen, I will briefly elaborate on the charged status that reproduction occupies in the context of Konsthall C and Hökarängen. As a historical term, reproduction is intimately connected to Marxist accounts of capitalist society in which it appears as complementary to production. Reproduction thus designates all that is not included in production, which amounts to human activity that is not directly enlisted as an accumulation of surplus value. In industrial modernity,

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<sup>6</sup> The degree to which *Sustainable Hökarängen* worked as a “greenwashing project, inventing new narratives of the area and attracting investors and resourceful residents, is still contested. Whereas Kindgreen and Gunnars argue the call for making Hökarängen more sustainable was a branding strategy, others argue that *Sustainable Hökarängen* also supported independent citizen-led initiatives that did not fit under the umbrella of gentrification. See *Konsten at sätta en Plats på Kartan och Konsekvenserna därutav*.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the shift in Sweden to a city-branding discourse committed to the goals of “blandad by” and to neoliberal strategies of urban regeneration, see Thörn & Holgersson 2014.

according to Marx, productive work is paid labor, it is included into the cycle of capitalist valorization, whereas reproduction names that which is at once beyond production and at the same time conditions productive work. In other words, reproduction is what takes place when the worker leaves the work place and what enables workers to return to their job the next day. It is family, physical and mental restitution as well as social livelihood. Today, however, reproduction have moved center stage as part of a service-oriented, global economy which has effaced the distinction between production and reproduction. This means that what was earlier evaluated as non-work, such as relational, affective, and creative labor have now become the epitome of capitalist valorization (Siegler 2017, p. 17).

As a model housing project conceived by modernist urban planners in the 1950s and as a location for 21st century gentrification processes, Hökarängen is charged with conflicting practices around reproduction. On the one hand, Hökarängen, manifests a pronounced awareness in postwar planners and architects in Sweden of the reproductive agency of the build environment. These reformist architects embraced rationalist planning ideas of “the functional city” which came to define urbanist discourse in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Mumford 2009).<sup>8</sup> According to these modernist ideas, the city could be understood as a rational machine. Housing areas served to reproduce labor power – that is – there exists a correlation between a functionalist planning ideology and the notion of the city as a machinery for capitalist accumulation. To the functionalist architect, solving the challenges of urbanization meant to make the machine work by separating dwelling, transportation, industry, and work. In this scheme, reproduction serves as a support structure within the overall productive apparatus of the city.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, the international planning practices that took form and came to influence urban development in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, also engaged with architecture as a site for co-shaping social practice and potentially implementing social reform. One of the strong concerns of reformist architects was the question of how to design housing units that fostered human interaction and encouraged community building. The American urban planner Clarence Perry developed a scheme for “the neighbourhood unit” which set up criteria for “face-to-face meetings, shared community functions, such as schools, churches, or libraries. Perry’s design criteria also came to impact the physical design of Hökarängen. What became pronounced in the Swedish variant of welfare state housing policy as it took form in 1940s, was an awareness of

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<sup>8</sup> See Mumford (2009) “The Prewar CIAM Vision of the Functional City”.

<sup>9</sup> De Angelis (2007), “Production, Reproduction and Global Loops”, pp. 65-75. Harvey (2013) p. 8., Mumford (2009), p. 166.

housing and architecture as an integral part of building a social and democratic welfare society (Nyström & Lundström 2006). Politically, the social democratic welfare state project was closely identified with the notion of the “*folkhemmet*” a term coined by preminister Per Albin Hansson and translated into urban planning by urban planner Uno Ahrén and the sociologist Gunnar Myrdal. The “*folkhem*” – (The People’s Home) was an important political concept in the building of the Swedish Welfare State. It became a symbolic name for the Swedish Welfare State, signaling that the state was like a family home in which everyone looked after each other.<sup>10</sup> Hökarängen is an outcome of such social reformist and democratic ideals. The small-scale neighbourhood were to cultivate democratic active citizens, taking actively part in community life and these ideas came to inform housing programs in Sweden for decades to come. Taking on a new materialist approach means that such structures cannot be discharged as merely historical or symbolic meanings. These structures of the functional city are active as physical and infrastructural divisions. They co-shape relations. It is also these structures that materially support the distributions and separations between private sphere and the sphere of work, between the field of unpaid domestic work and paid work which *Home Works* took as its field of inquiry. Similarly, the possibility of mobilizing Hökarängen as a site of active citizenship and democratic co-habitation is equally inscribed into the variability of its physical structures.

### **Working in Hökarängen, art research as socio-material workings**

The central term that I will seize upon in relation to *Home Works* is the notion of responsivity and what this notion might entail in terms of enacting realities. Responsivity came up as a major idea and curatorial method when speaking to Jens Strandberg and Jenny Richards:

I suppose the essential thing in all this is that it is based around people who are very sociable. It is based around us, and being open to new connections, and relationships. We’re really responsive so if someone comes to us and say, oh we could do that, then we listen and if we think it can be developed in a meaningful way and we can find a supportive framework for the suggestion, we try to find a way to incorporate open proposals into the program. So, there is not a specific form of “this is how this interacts”. It’s just organic. Obviously, it comes from a context and a political position, but it is responsive and grows spontaneously. So, you cannot identify a strategy that is fixed, it’s more a strategy of openness and sociability. With who lives here and who we know.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Influenced by Lewis Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities*, Ahrén and Myrdal co-authored the seminal *The Housing Question as a Social Planning Problem* in 1934, which formulated strategies that came to play a vital part in the large-scale restructuring of the Swedish society by postwar social democratic governments.

<sup>11</sup> Conversation with Jens Strandberg and Jenny Richards April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

What becomes accentuated in this statement is that being sociable, making connections, is a vital part of how the program developed and related to the local environment. “We’re really responsive so if someone comes to us and say, oh we could do that, then we just incorporate that into the program” Jenny explains. So, what are the implications of this emphasis on sociability and responsivity as a key tool in building the program? Obviously, the act of making connections, of establishing relations make up a basic skill of the curator as a mediating figure, so to a certain degree responsivity is a feature that resides within the profession. However, in the above quote, responsivity is being highlighted as a key methodological conduct determining the direction of the program. I want to argue that the statement above is evocative of a more fundamental ambivalence within the program of *Home Works*, an ambivalence that is intimately connected to the somewhat uneasy seating of *Home Works* within a context of urban regeneration. On the one hand, responsivity, an openness to form new connections, is a cardinal virtue of an entrepreneurial spirit – and thus can be associated with the flexible service worker who adapts to needs and delivers collaboration and communicative networks, thus fitting into spatio-political arrangements already at work (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007, Virno 2001). On the other hand, responsivity may signify a political stance – an ethico-political practice of relating and working from within relations – from within socio-material arrangements. It is the latter interpretation of responsivity as a situated politics of action that I will argue became critical to how *Home Works* evolved as an urban experiment. In order to unpack how responsivity came to work as strategy to enact, and reconfigure socio-material relations from within, it is necessary, however, to provide some background and to turn to a seminal event in the unfolding of the program.

### **Touch sanitation – maintenance as spatial connecting and making visible**

As part of their opening exhibition *Maintenance Art Works 1969–1980* - and in order to present the thematic frame of domestic (reproductive) work – *Home Works* presented the performative project: *Touch Sanitation* (1977-1980) by Mierle Ladermann Ukeles (figure 1).



Figure 1, Installation view, *Maintenance Art Works 1969–1980*, Konsthall C, 2016, © Jens Strandberg

Ukeles engaged in this project to call attention to the invisible maintenance work carried out by sanitation workers in the city of New York. The artist set out on a quest to shake hands with every sanitation worker in the city district of New York – saying “Thank you for keeping New York City alive”. Concerned as she was with a feminist critique of the denigration of domestic labor, in connecting to the sanitation department Ukeles connected the sphere of the home with the sphere of the city. In both cases, Ukeles’ project demonstrated, maintenance was being taken for granted. Travelling around the city, greeting and thanking the sanitation workers, Ukeles called attention to the fact that cleaning and maintenance, even if it conditions life and the production of value in the city, is not valued in its own terms. She thereby pointed at a founding aphoria of modern society: the systematic devaluation of care work, of the work, whether carried out in the home or in the city, that provide the support structure for capitalist production.



### Handshaking as a methodological cue

Central to the realization of Ukeles' Touch Sanitation is the physical act of the handshake, as a performative ritual, and this was echoed in the exhibition at Konsthall C in which images of Ukeles shaking hands with sanitation workers in various parts of New York made up the visual communication of the project (figure 2)



Figure 2. Installation-shot from *Maintenance Art Works 1969–1980*, Konsthall C, 2016, © Jens Strandberg

As a performative enactment, the handshake enables human contact and reciprocity. It could even be conceived of as a gestural emblem for a primordial disposition towards others, a mode of relating

defined by responsiveness.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Ukeles' handshaking ritual performance enacts a spatial practice – a way of enacting the city, calling into visibility the trajectories – the spatial practices of the sanitation workers as well as forging new networks of solidarity. "Hand to hand. A hand-chain to hold up the whole City. Or a web, spun hand to hand. Circling the city, bound round and round until it's all woven together."<sup>13</sup> Finally, the corporal and spatial act of making contact, linking one node in the city with another, is also a political act in the sense that it connects struggles. Thereby it claims another way of making the city intelligible, thus calling it into being. It calls attention to the city as a structure of dependence, thus disturbing the notion that agency and value creation belongs to the visible and highly valued production of the city. In the exhibition at Konsthall C, *Touch Sanitation* featured as a conventional piece of exhibited artwork, thus establishing a thematic correspondence to the issues raised by *Home Works*. At this stage in the program, thematics and locality were merely connected through the assertive utterance of the exhibition. Its connection to Hökarängen was of an assertive nature and established through explicit curatorial address. The reason why I delve on this initial exhibition of Ukeles' sanitation work is that I want to argue that handshaking as a methodological strategy came to play a seminal role in the gradual transition of *Home Works* from what could be said to be a "generic exhibition practice" to a locally embedded series of socio-material enactments. *Home Works* evolved as an experimental research project in which exhibitions took on the function of forming questions, presenting artistic investigations of the home, and an extended public program introduced the formats of communal dinners, cooking sessions, collaborations with groups and organizations, commissioned art projects engaged in collective production. Whereas these formats, since the emergence of New Institutionalism in the 2000s, are well established also as institutional behavior (Esche 2013), in the case of *Home Works*, I want to argue, these research and production strategies were applied as a means to enact new realities of the city, thus opening up alternative modes of configuring local co-living in Hökarängen.

### **Research as performing "ontological politics"**

As I have argued above, responsivity can be interpreted as a fundamental disposition to others, an alertness and openness to relate – whether to human beings, a material arrangement, such as the physical site of Hökarängen, or to social situations. An image for such a composure, I have argued,

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<sup>12</sup> See also Athanasieou and Butler's discussion of responsiveness as responsibility and "a disposition towards others" in *Dispossession* p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> Press Release, 1979

was present in the gestural language of the handshake. The unfolding of *Home Works* took place as a process of working from within the relations that were already at stake in the local environment of Hökarängen. For example, curator Jens Strandberg developed a practice of walking around the town, getting to know people, establishing relationships with residents, local self-organized groups, and becoming a part of the local community. Not quite unlike Ukeles, Jens shook hands, spent time walking around in Hökarängen. He found ways of collaborating with Hökarängens Stadsdelsråd, Martinskolan – a local Steiner school, self-organized initiatives such as hopp! A local film collective, Thermo-vegetarian cooking society, as well as talking to local shop owners. The communal dinners held at Konsthall C were very much a follow up of this spatial practice of connecting and relating.



Figure 3, Jens Strandberg walking in Hökarängen, in conversation with the director of the local film society. February, 2017. © author

In other words, walking around in Hökarängen became a way of connecting people, spaces and ideas. And it was through this embodied and spatial practice that the abstract thematic of a critique of the home and of the devalued status of affective and reproductive work became vernacular. It turned into a socio-material practice that negotiated how to live in Hökarängen. In both a literal and imaginative sense, the relational practice of Jens walking, “shaking hands” engaged with the material affordances that were intrinsic to the material infrastructure of Hökarängen as invented by

architects as a model suburban town<sup>14</sup>. In this way handshaking reactivated what was becoming oblique under the new urban regeneration scheme: the postwar welfare mantra that housing was a social problem.

### **Elderly care as symptom**

Moving between these historical trajectories for social housing and a contemporary urban reality, *HW* picked up on a public controversy in Stockholm around elderly care. In 2016 new measures for monitoring the time spent by care workers in the homes of elderly clients were introduced. Care workers were to carry an app that would monitor time spent on a task and thus survey the workers. *HW* seized this public debate by organizing a discussion on the issue of elderly care policies, in Konsthall C inviting Hökarängens Hemtjänst, a local cooperative care company, Kommunal, the largest union for care workers in Sweden, Hemtjänst Upproret, an activist group of care workers and Clara Lindblom from the left-wing party who was responsible for the elderly care system in Stockholm. The way in which *HW* responded to this public controversy was to pose a question which addressed the underlying economization of care work that informed this formalization of time management. As Gunilla Lundahl commented, speaking of the “elderly burden” as has become normalized in contemporary welfare Sweden, points to an economization of care, and leaves out the constitutive human dimension of care – as a founding disposition towards the other, as a source of human relatedness and mutual dependence<sup>15</sup>. Lundahl proposed the question: What would elderly care be, if it was valued as a source of public wealth rather than as a burden? So what *Home Works* proposed was to acknowledge an initial misconception at the heart of current political debate around elderly care. As an opening up of the possible meanings of care, *Home Works* engaged with elderly care practice as a potential site of political struggle. A line of flight, in the sense of shifting the semantic-material arrangements of how elderly care created realities was thus established through the responsivity strategy of *Home Works*. Responsivity, as a methodological tool, thus unfolded as a readiness to connect to emerging struggles over the reproduction of the city – here the care work performed in the homes of elderly people. This initial response is of a discursive kind, it starts off as pointing to a misconception in how elderly care becomes practised through governmental apparatuses – such as apps for monitoring time, - and how these apparatuses structure

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of affordance is coined by James Gibson (1979) to indicate possibilities for action that resides in the environment. The notion of affordances has been applied in architectural theory to point to how material components of an environment, for example paths or squares are active in enabling everyday social action.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with Camilla Lundahl September 24th, 2016.



everyday spatial practice. In the second instance, however, this linking of Hökarängen to the care app case, evolved into new projects and interferences into the socio-material realities in Hökarängen. Firstly, *Home Works* arranged a public debate as mentioned above. In addition to this, two artistic projects embedded in Hökarängen evolved from this. One was “This is what they told me...”, another was “Watch Out, One Day You Might Be Part of the Elderly Care System Too!!” and a third was the collaboration between Hemtjänst Upproret and the artist Ciara Phillips. “This is what they told me...” was an interference into the private homes of elderly residents in Hökarängen. Over the course of one week, Gunilla Lundgren visited fifteen homes in the neighbourhood, interviewing residents about their home, life in Hökarängen, and how the home changes when it also become a workspace. In line with Ukeles’ collaboration with New York Sanitation Department, Lundahl collaborated with the local company Hökarängens Hemtjänst to visit residents who received elderly care. According to Lundahl, these elderly residents “made up the soul of Hökarängen”<sup>16</sup>.



Figure 4, Map of Hökarängen indicating the homes of the interviewed residents, © Konsthall C

<sup>16</sup> Conversation with Camilla Lundahl September 24th, 2016.

The resulting accounts of lived experiences with the neighbourhood planning in Hökarängen opened up a pool to access multiple versions of what social sustainability meant, and what care for your neighbour implied for these residents. Rather than an “elderly burden” the project posited these elderly residents as confiders into practices of everyday life where material amenities were scarce, but where the social life of the community was strong. In this way “This is what they told me...” applied a research method that opened up alternative accounts of commonality and care as a way to invent new community practices.

### **The Communal Laundry - A New Materialist, pragmatist account**

In initiating activities and experimenting with new uses of the laundry, *Home Works* did not primarily conceive of this space as a sanctioned frame for producing and showing art, but rather as a material support structure and a socio-spatial infrastructure embedded in the larger infrastructure of Hökarängen’s housing program. Thus, the building itself became engaged not as a passive object, but as an active agent, a set of material and physical arrangements and structures that co-shape reality. During the exhibition *Expansions of Home Craft*, the video work: *The Home as a Tool for Exploring Life* by Kristina Schultz in which the artist documents a recording of an experiment, in which she, her partner and her five-year-old son clears out their apartment from all things, in order to craft other possibilities.



Figure 5, installation shot, Kristina Schultz, *The Home as a Tool for Exploring Life*. © author

In the absence of things: furniture, kitchen tools or beds Schultz reinvents daily life by using whatever materials are at hand, such as paper shopping bags, homemade spoons, for performing basic activities such as eating, sleeping and organizing the home. Schultz thereby called attention to how reproductive work, here the intimate and affective practice of parental care, is basically dependent on, and entangled with, things and material artifacts. Things in Schultz' artistic experiment afford a care practice. Transferred to the premises of the laundry, *Home Works* experimented with how the space, the material arrangement in itself, could be put at stake as an agent. As it can be deferred from figure 1, what was being made visible in the exhibition, was not merely the exhibited artworks. These artworks were almost discretely, and scarcely, placed along the walls of the room, leaving open an encounter with the material structure of the space – a cut off section of an industrial laundry. At certain times the repercussions coming from the centrifuge on the other side of the wall can be felt through the floor. The tiles of the floor which are tiles used for industrial purposes, co-mediate what takes place in the space. Marks and traces of former washing facilities are physical components that testify to the actual labor of the washing machines and call

attention to the possibilities of that space as a material infrastructure for the everyday practice of the neighbourhood. In this way the building *does something* in practice to those who relate to it (Yaneva 2017 p.111). The floor, interspersed with metal drains to get rid of waste water, also connects to the former use of the space as a communal laundry. The space in itself is thus active in enacting its potential as a production space and as a material support structure for the community households. It does not represent, or symbolize. Rather, it suggests and enables usages by pointing to its own physical possibilities as ingrained into a housing infrastructure. Through the large windows facing west, daylight enters in abundant measure, disclosing, and thereby turning it into a part of that spatial reality, the building as affording contact with the nature park outside.



Figure 5, exhibition shot, *Expansions of Home Craft* showing large windows facing West. © author

The moment that light moves into the space, the building activates a trajectory of possibilities to a social practice that were invented – and an implicit part of – postwar Swedish folkhem practices. This is, one could argue, a historical reference, nevertheless it is also a potentiality present in the material structures themselves. Activated by the moving daylight, this aspect of the building thus becomes a component of the present spatial reality. Through the large windows, a glimpse of the



surrounding housing blocks painted in ochre and mingled with tall pine trees makes tangible how the laundry forms part of a larger infrastructure that enacts possible realities of community and co-living. These spatio-material agencies of the building itself were exposed in *Expansions of Home Craft*, thus making it feasible how responsiveness as a key methodological tool did not merely unfold in responding to people in the area. It also extended to the spatial and material component of site-specific research. *Home Works* responded to its physical site as a co-actor and a partner in the experiment of how to reproduce life in Hökarängen. A similar experimentation with the affordances of material structures took place in the combined kitchen and office. As it can be seen in figure 7, the kitchen/office is located as an adjoining room at the far end of the main space. Rather than separating kitchen and office-function from the exhibition space, the kitchen/office is spatially folded into the main space. This is underscored by the fact that most of the glass doors which have been installed to close off the kitchen/office area are open. A large table worked as simultaneously a working desk for staff, as a lunch table, meeting table for seminars, knitting cafés, open house dinners, printing workshops, as a cooking and as a buffet table for the weekly thermo-vegetarian cooking society. It became enacted as a multi-functional shared space. One could then argue that just like Ukeles' *Mainainance Work* became a creative methodology of relating and engaging with material infrastructures in Hökarängen, so Schultz' *The Home as a Tool for Exploring Life* in a similar way provided a creative methodology for exploring how the material affordances of the former laundry could co-guide experiments with how communal life and neighbor solidarity could be enacted in Hökarängen.



Figure 7, installation shot, exposing at the same time the physical structure, the exhibition, and at the back the kitchen/office which at this moment was enacted as location for a local cooking club. © author

As an infrastructural knot – the laundry connected people. It concentrated and redistributed flows of events. And *Home Works* expanded and experimented with these capacities by inviting people to take charge of the space, making it accessible.<sup>17</sup> Thus the space turned into a social nexus that “shifted the trajectory of people and things”(Yaneva, 2017, p. 64). So what does it mean? It means that the building itself, its spatial organization, its physical embeddedness into a material infrastructure – the neighbourhood unit – co-shapes possibilities for action. A materialist approach shifts the way in which architecture means, away from representation, according to which architecture reflects or is imprinted with specific meanings, to enactment. According to a representationalist view, the laundry would be approached as a symbolic, representational edifice materializing the grand notion of the folkhemmet, and “grannskabstanken”, the idea that the democratic citizen is formed through the everyday face-to-face encounters with fellow residents. The laundry and its material realities would then serve a symbolic function, offering its historical and symbolic meanings to a present-day use. The restrictions of this approach are that it does not

<sup>17</sup> Conversation with Jens Strandberg, September 23th, 2016.

pay attention to the active mediation of the laundry itself and, its embeddedness in a physical environment – in other word to the enacted nature of realities.

## Conclusion

As I have argued above, Konsthall C is ambivalently situated in Hökarängen inbetween local grassroots structures, (Hökarängens Staddelsråd), Urban restructuring schemes (Sustainability programs initiated by Stockholmshem), gentrification markers, and a critical art discourse informed by New Institutionalism. As such, Konsthall C and *Home Works* can be charged with the critique that frequently becomes directed at socially engaged art projects – that of outsourcing the responsibility of social integration (Bishop). One could argue that Konsthall C delivers what is being discharged under the rule of neoliberal urban restructuring: social responsibility and a sense of community. *Home Works*, by offering its spatial premises as a platform for social cohesion, care for the community, compensates for the social deterioration caused by post-welfare urban planning. The issue of reproduction, thus, was not only critically claimed as a political issue at the level of curatorial programming, it also appeared problematically as a meta-structural question, of how *Home Works* was assigned a role in the overall new economy of city branding procedures. Along the lines of the critique of New Institutionalism for apparently offering an inclusive social platform, but in fact setting up an exclusionary place reserved for the insiders of art community and intellectuals, Konsthall C, and *Home Works*, could also be charged with employing the legacy of the communal laundry to assert a social agency, which in reality was replaced by a kind of “social positivity” – the idea that social engagement, social platform is unconditionally beneficial, thus obscuring that the sociality introduced by Konsthall C was one of an elitist art community. (Sheik, 2010). Following this line of argument, Konsthall C could be said to make symbolically use of the building of the former public laundry, symbolically appropriating its ideological meaning as an emblem of the Swedish folkhemmet and a site of democratic co-living<sup>18</sup>. What I have tried to argue in this article, however, is that, while not refuting that Konsthall C does take up such a function of welfare provision surrogate within the logics of post-welfare city branding, nevertheless, this critique misses the point of the agency of *Home Works* and how the project engaged with the local area. Instead, I have argued that *Home Works* evolved as a performative engagement with these

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<sup>18</sup> For a study of the linkage between Albin Hansson’s vision of folkhemmet and the introduction in Sweden of the communal laundry see Lund, 2009.

materialities and that this enactment became the locus of struggle around the urban reality of Hökarängen. In this way artistic research worked as “a relation between what is and what might be”.

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